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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 001864

SIPDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2013

TAGS: [AEMR](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [CVIS](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: TFIZ01: AMMAN SITREP 15 (3/27 1800 LOCAL)

REF: A. (A) AMMAN 1835

[1](#)B. (B) FBIS GMP2003026000151

[1](#)C. (C) AMMAN 1801

[1](#)D. (D) AMMAN 1744

Classified By: Acting DCM Doug Silliman. Reason 1.5 (b,d).

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General Overview  
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[1](#)1. (C) Embassy EAC met March 27 to discuss security measures in anticipation of significant protest activity after Friday prayers on March 28. EAC issued a "standfast" order for all non-emergency personnel for 3/28 until 1800. After 1800, unless notified differently, post posture will return to allowing American personnel essential movements, to include travel to the Embassy and stops for necessary supplies. The EAC will reassess the local security environment following the weekend.

[1](#)2. (U) In a postscript to the expulsion of Iraqi diplomats from Jordan for security reasons earlier in the week, and the GOI's verbal attacks against the GOJ for doing so (ref A), the official Petra New Agency quoted the Iraqi Ambassador to Jordan Sabah Yasin as characterizing the entire affair as "no more than a passing summer cloud." In an meeting with GOJ Minister of Industry and Trade Salah Bashir, the Iraqi Ambassador indicated that the three expelled Iraqi diplomats will be replaced "as soon as possible." (ref B)

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Privately, GOJ security officials have confirmed rumors that a fire set at the Amman Hyatt Hotel on March 22 was set by IIS saboteurs. (ref C)

[1](#)4. (SBU) Approximately 7,000 people attended funerals in the northern Jordanian city of Ramtha (near Irbid) for the Jordanian students killed in Mosul March 23 (ref D). As of 1800, PSD had not reported any disturbances associated with the funerary march.

[1](#)5. (SBU) About 1,000 anti-U.S., but pro-government, protesters held a demonstration at Jordan University March [1](#)27. PSD notes that the demonstration was peaceful.

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Consular Issues  
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[1](#)6. (U) No new issues.

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GOJ Actions/Statements  
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[1](#)7. (U) Planning Minister Bassam Awadullah welcomed the Ambassador's announcement of the President's proposed \$1.1 billion supplemental aid package for Jordan. Awadullah said the aid would "help mitigate the impact of war and make sure that Jordan's success story is not jeopardized." He noted the international community recognized that allowing the Jordanian economic model to fail would have negative consequences for U.S. and European development plans for the rest of the region. Awadullah expressed confidence that the EU would soon increase its aid to Jordan along similar lines.

[1](#)8. (U) The official Petra news service reported (ref B) that GOJ Industry and Trade Minister Bashir telephoned Iraqi Trade Minister Muhammed Mahdi Salih 3/26 and "emphasized the deep relations between the two brotherly countries." The report stated that Bashir told Salih that he would work with the Iraqi Ambassador in Jordan to find "mechanisms that would facilitate and expedite the constant flow of goods to Iraq . . . and emphasized that issues regarding transportation, rapid and smooth flow of goods, and alternatives determined by priorities in order to meet humanitarian needs in Iraq will be studied."

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Security  
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[1](#)9. (C) The GID and PSD will deploy additional security personnel overnight around the Embassy, ancillary USG

facilities, and neighborhoods where Embassy housing is located, as part of the GOJ's overall preparations for possible 3/28 post-prayers demonstrations. As noted para 1, Embassy will implement a standfast order for American employees until 1800 on Friday.

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Economic and Trade Developments  
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110. (C) Port activity: QIZ exporters reported rumors that container ships have been delayed coming into Aqaba. Shipping Agents Association Chairman Dalabieh confirms that inbound freight has experienced slight delays over the past 48 hours, but attributes the delay to inclement weather and to an inoperable gantry crane at the port, which delayed berthing and offloading, respectively. Dalabieh said inbound cargo should resume as normal starting March 27.

111. (sbu) Internet companies report a sharp upsurge in internet use, particularly email traffic, over the last week (septel). The technical support director at the largest internet provider in Jordan said that sophisticated software is allowing users to access and download tv news reports, which are then given broad circulation via email. Despite an increase in traffic that has at times reached 95% capacity, providers report no problems with continued service.

112. (sbu) Similarly, mobile provider MobileCom said that levels of text messaging (or SMS) traffic are also on the rise, as much as twice the normal level at times. Stephane Boudier, Chief Technical Officer for MobileCom said there was "no strain" on the system. He added, however, that the company was getting a "steadily rising" number of complaints about inability to connect to land lines in Iraq, a problem the company is attributing to degradation of the Iraqi telecom infrastructure due to the conflict.

113. (sbu) Trading on the Amman Stock Exchange was flat Thursday, the index up .08%.

114. (sbu) Target Corporation continues to book orders through Jordanian QIZs and said they have no plans to discontinue unless events on the ground change. The company gave this reassurance despite an increase in fuel charge per kilo from five cents to twenty cents for the Middle East imposed March 24. Target officials said that a shortage of aircraft due to military action and a decrease in passenger travel added to the increased transportation costs.

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Refugee/Humanitarian Issues  
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115. (U) UNHCR & IOM report that the Jordan-Iraq border remains open. Seven TCNs entered Jordan from Iraq overnight (March 26-27) but there have been no TCN arrivals since 1:00 am. There are currently 173 TCNs in the transit camp. Still no sign of any Iraqi refugees/asylum seekers.

116. (U) Weather conditions improved considerably March 27, allowing IOM to resume its repatriation operations. Four Somalis left the camp and another six are scheduled to leave on March 28. Some Sudanese & Somali nationals have told IOM officials they do not want to return home. UNHCR officials currently are interviewing these individuals.

117. (C) MSF/Amman has not received any news from its two-truck convoy that crossed from Jordan into Iraq on March 26. Separately, the French Embassy in Amman told UNHCR officials that it has heard that the Amman-Baghdad highway has been "cut" by coalition forces 80 km west of Baghdad.

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Press  
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118. (SBU) Banner headlines in all Jordanian dailies March 27 highlighted developments in the war. Lead reports focus on the bombing of a marketplace in Baghdad and continued battles in southern Iraq. Other major stories highlight remarks by Iraq's Ambassador to Jordan that the recent diplomatic "tiff" between the countries was a "tempest in a teapot," and that bilateral relations remain normal. Editorials continue to criticize the war in the strongest terms, to express admiration for Iraqi resistance, and to voice outrage over civilian casualties.

119. (U) The Ambassador's announcement of the President's request for \$1.1 billion in supplemental aid for Jordan appeared on the front pages and in the economic pages of all Jordanian dailies March 27. One local commentator noted that "Western assistance to Jordan reflects sensitivity to the losses suffered by the economy due to war."